Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Role of Digital Marketing on Student Engagement and Decision Making in Higher Education Institutions

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By

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1. Introduction:

Academic establishments, such as colleges and universities, encounter an extensive array of operational challenges and obstacles in the contemporary era, higher education institutions are compelled to re-evaluate their overarching strategies and modify their marketing efforts due to the immediate consequences of the numerous changes in the global environment. The implementation of the novel strategy was imperative for universities to remain viable in the demand-side economy. (Alexa, Alexa, & Stoica, 2012). By utilising digital tools and methods, these institutions can engage and communicate with students and stakeholders in an efficient manner, thereby aiding in the promotion of their programmes and the achievement of their enrolment and retention goals. (Erkan, Unal, & Acikgoz, 2023). The occurrence of this effect is a reasonable probability that should not be discounted. It is possible that the advertisements that a customer views on the internet will have an effect on the customer's mental state. On the other hand, the characteristics of online advertising, such as the information that is presented, creativity, and the many modes of involvement, have a considerable impact on the customer's perception of the product or service that is being advertised. (Davidavičienė et al., 2014). Although the use of social media for college searches is becoming increasingly prevalent throughout higher education institutions, it is not entirely clear whether or not the use of social media for college searches has an influence on the college selections that prospective students make. This is despite the fact that the use of social media for college searches is growing more and more prevalent. (El Nemar et al., 2020). . To determine the preferences that students have with respect to the presentation of their creative ideas, it is recommended that educational institutions establish a distinct account on social media platforms, which are often used by students. This will allow the institutions to gauge the preferences of students. This will make it possible for educational institutions to ascertain the preferences that pupils have. (Prabowo et al., 2020).

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Social Media Marketing:

There are a lot of aspects of consumer decision-making that are being significantly influenced by the rise of internet-based communications. These aspects include purchasing behaviour, reviews, communication of brands, and other fields that are associated with the internet. (Almakbuli, Khan, & Ahmed, 2021). When it comes to marketing and promotional endeavours, educational institutions of higher learning often participate in the practice of using social media platforms as a technique of conducting operations (Dao, Le, Cheng, & Chen, 2014). It is acknowledged by seventy percent of the students that social media has an effect on the choices they make and the methods they use in order to search for information. The fact that the higher education institution is using social media should not come as a surprise given that this is the population that they are trying to recruit into their educational institute.

Those persons who are now enrolled in high educational institute and are 18 years old are regarded to be the target market group for this particular advertising campaign (Kannan & Li, 2017). Organisations that want to widen their brand's reach, stand out, and establish a unique identity among customers are increasingly resorting to social media venues (Gambhir & Rubaid, 2023). Students engage and collaborate to engage in educational conversations over the Internet, allowing scientific methods to function in tandem with current understanding and technological advances. Education has evolved from conventional methods to be more contemporary and adaptable (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019). Social media has evolved into an indispensable instrument for maintaining connections with students at each and every stage of their academic careers. This is true for the whole of a student's lifetime. (Nasri, Namaziandost, & Keshmirshekan, 2019)

2.2 Website Attributes:

Web-based advertising has a significant impact on student enrolment choices. An educational institution's website features probably have the power to significantly impact the amount of participation adolescents experience with the institution of education. This is so because these characteristics influence how students engage with their institution on the web, which impacts every aspect of their educational

experience (Alhabeeb & Rowley, 2018). consequently it is, therefore, necessary to offer these sorts of services owing to their considerable influence on students' attractiveness and contentment regarding the particular educational institution (Jager & Jan, 2015). Every college website ought to strive to deliver transparent as well as understandable information in the most straightforward manner possible, as well as to position the institution among the greatest users' experiences in the eyes of students. The institution should create a customised portal for each user segment that aligns along with its digital infrastructure and highlights different divisions (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). College's academic support may encourage student engagement. This emphasises that the kind and amount of information offered verify student's discretion in the choosing of institute and favourable word-of-mouth (Hosein & Rao, 2023)

2.3 Display Ads:

Online display ads offer a cost-effective option to target certain client groups, providing both accuracy and outreach to a large audience. Display advertisements may effectively target future students and offer relevant products/services (Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017). Higher education educational institutes employ banner advertising to create a primary perspective and enlighten the community, which may include a short message and audio or video content (Rauschnabe, Kery, Babin, & Ivens, 2016). An ad's subject matter and purpose ought to remain concise and straightforward, stressing the sort of offering that is meant to capture students' attention and direct them to the university's website. Effective display advertisements on highly visited websites can attract potential students and lead to visits to the university's website, ultimately affecting their decision-making process (Singh & Jack, 2018). When potential students see the institution's advertisements on multiple platforms, they see it as a credible and reputable organisation. As time passes, this level of familiarity may shape students' views and inclinations, increasing their likelihood of exploring their educational institution (N. Paladan, 2018). Advertisements that are not only intriguing but also appealing have the ability to capture the attention of younger people, namely students. advertising that are creative and visually attractive, as well as those that effectively depict the college's goals, campus culture, and student life,

have the potential to draw the attention and interest of prospective students (Foroudi et al., 2020).

2.4 Credibility:

By utilising various social networking platforms in general organisations can enhance confidence consumers have in their organisations and shape the perspectives of their target audience. However, to ensure consumer trust, it is crucial to offer them products or services that are valuable and worth the money they are spending, rather than solely focusing on superficial aesthetics. It is essential to uphold the complete confidence of prospects. (Zadeh, Farhang, Zolfagharian, & Hofacker, 2023). When individual is faced with the option of determining if they want to make use of a particular information infrastructure, his or her assessment of the legitimacy of the platform plays a significant role in influencing their choice of option. (Najdawi, Chabani, & Said, 2021). This is because of the fact that the trust variable is of the utmost importance. (Munikrishnan, Huang, Mamun, & Hayat, 2023). An institution's good reputation conveys to potential students that it is highly regarded and reliable, thereby motivating them to enrol in the educational institution (Wong et al., 2020). Institutional credibility covers several facets, including public perception, educational excellence, job prospects, resources, networking possibilities, and financial factors. Prospective students refer to these characteristics to assess whether an educational institution aligns with their academic goals, career ambitions, and provides a conducive atmosphere for personal and professional development. Students who prioritize quality, honesty, and academic achievement are more likely to be enrolled and kept by an elite educational institution (Balroo & Saleh, 2019).

2.5 Student Engagement:

Student engagement is crucial for the success of educational institutions and plays a pivotal role in nurturing a well-rounded and accomplished student body. Encouraging student engagement requires creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Investing in student engagement ultimately leads to the growth and success of both the students and the institution as a whole.(Trowler, 2010). Engagement refers to the students' involvement in higher-level educational initiatives which lead to excellent quality achievements in learning. This involves both students and higher education

institutions working together with the objective of improving the institution's effectiveness and trustworthiness (Krause & Coates, 2008). Numerous students experience a decline in enthusiasm, a sense of isolation and insignificance, or a lack of awareness regarding the available resources for their achievement. Maintaining an atmosphere of engaged learners necessitates the implementation of virtual engagement, interventions, enhanced communication actions, and a knowledge of how the actual campus may complement these socializing efforts (Kahu, 2013). It has been observed that the integration of technology in educational environments has been effectively implemented to a significant extent. The majority of educators utilise technology to actively involve pupils in academic endeavours and enhance learning prospects. Student engagement refers to the enthusiasm and enthusiasm exhibited by learners as they actively participate in a range of academic achievements (Kaur & Kauts, 2018). The active involvement of present students is of utmost importance for their academic progression and development. Engaging alumni post-graduation can yield advantages for a educational institute, as alumni possess the capacity to contribute financially and serve as advocates for their alma mater (Bedenlier et al., 2020).

2.6 Students Decision Making:

While the decision-making process may not appear to be as simple as it appears, there appears to be a limited availability of academic inquiry that has attempted to examine the various facets of how students are inspired when selecting a higher education institution (Othman et al., 2019). Students' decision to attend a university is heavily influenced by their internet research. Students would seek guidance and recommendations from their peers on social media, as well as check university pages and websites. Friends and online communities may help students exchange views on universities, leading to informed decisions (Pokhrel, Tiwari, & Phuyal, 2016). Student decisions are often influenced by a wide range of circumstances. The decision-making process occurs once a student is happy with the examination of the elements available that match their needs. The decision-making process is essentially the process by which students determine whether or not to attend college (Nemar & Vrontis, 2016). Because of an increasingly structured college admissions procedure, students' choosing approach has grown more significant, and a variety of criteria have developed to be essential considerations for college selection (Othman, Mohamad, &

Barom, 2019). This matter holds significant importance for the educational institution's administrators in terms of strategic planning. Gaining insight into students' behaviour regarding academics decision-making has the potential to optimize academic planning and efficiency and affordability, thereby enriching the educational experience for both students and instructors (Beggs et al., 2008)

2.7 Word of Mouth:

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a word that is used to describe interpersonal contacts that are not focused on commercialization and are informal in nature. These interactions are connected to higher education (Chen, 2016). In today's fiercely competitive marketplace, it's important to brand an educational institution's appearance via effective techniques. Thus, the brand represents the ability of the educational institution to meet the needs of students, and the creation of confidence in the institution's capability of delivering superior amenities to students (Zhao et al., 2023). The capacity to provide exceptional service and to engage in creative thinking both have the potential to generate positive word-of-mouth and to boost the possibility that students will enrol in colleges that they are interested in attending. On the other hand, there is a broader variety of possibilities available for the dissemination of good word-of-mouth throughout the community (Manohar, 2018). The level of accuracy of e-WOM has a significant impact on colleges' image. E-WOM is not restricted to a specific technology or demographic. Analysts have revealed that young people, as well as exceptionally knowledgeable individuals, constitute an essential component of e-WOM. The image of universities is constructed via the use of one-of-a-kind sources of information (Zeglat et al., 2016). Students are more satisfied when they obtain excellent information that aligns with their expectations and favourably impacts their perspective on things. This will eventually result to more involvement in good word-of-mouth generation, and the students will eventually gravitate more in the direction enrolling with educational institutions (Yilmaz, 2017).

3. Research Gap:

The literature review undertaken by the researcher reveal that most studies are either on Social Media Marketing for non-educational sectors or very different from Indian Context. In Indian context there are negligible studies in the domain of impact of Social media marketing on student engagement and furthermore student’s

engagement impact on decision making process and positive word of mouth. Since the impact of Social Media Marketing strategies has various attitudinal and psychological disparities the findings of western culture cannot be replicated directly in Indian Educational Sector. There is a need to understand that when educational institutes are investing into development of technological infrastructure and changing their methods of approaching and engaging students from conventional to digital what is its overall impact on students' decision to enrol with a particular institute and how favourable he gives word of mouth recommendations about that institute.

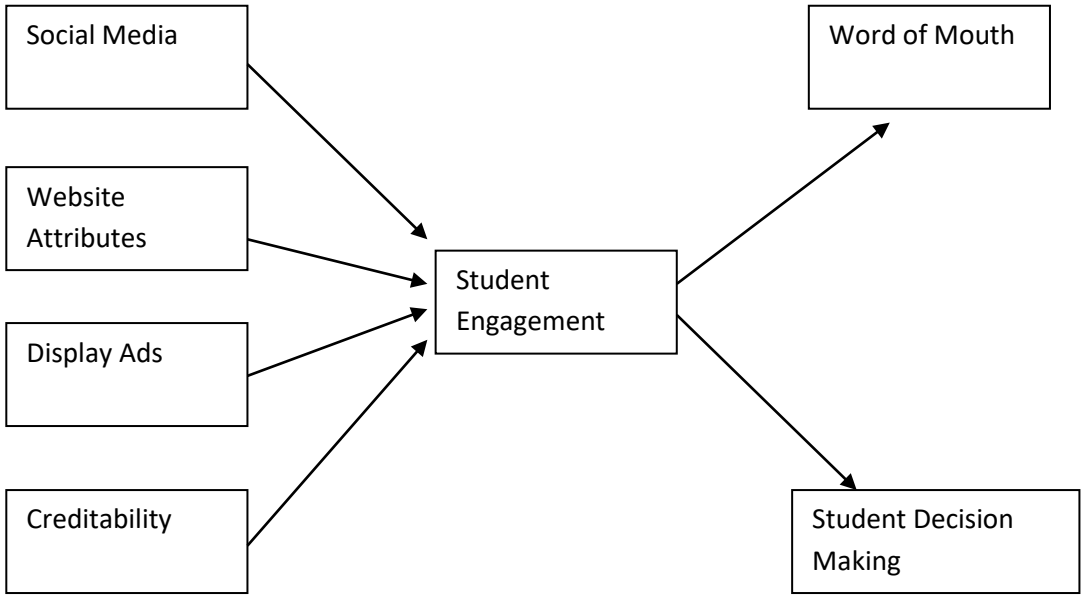
4. Research Objective:

Primary Objective: The main objective of this research is examining how students' perceptions of online advertising and website credibility affect their decision-making and involvement with Colleges. In addition, this study aims to determine how exactly this interaction enhances the emergence of enrolment and admission actions and how it aids in creating favourable referrals.

Secondary Objective: To study the impact of social media on student engagement

- To study the impact of website, digital ads and creditability attributes on student engagement
- To establish the relationship between mediating variable (Student engagement) on independent variables (social media, website attributes, digital ads, creditability) and dependent variable (Student decision making, WOM)
- To study the impact of Student engagement on enrolment decision
- To study impact of student engagement on generating positive WOM
- The study the mediating role of Student Engagement on independent variables (social media, website attributes, digital ads, creditability) and dependent variables (word of mouth, student decision making)
- To understand impact of social media marketing on various demographic perspective of students

5. Proposed Model of the Study:



6. Research Design:

The research aims to identify the social media marketing aspects that affect the engagement of students and the impact this has on the student decision-making process. The widespread adoption of information technology, internet access, and mobile phones has increased student participation. However, it is crucial to understand which of the most significant and effective factors influencing student involvement. Furthermore, the consequences that resulted from this involvement should be examined. As a consequence, it is vital to understand the components that make a difference to the successful student involvement via social media marketing and its subsequent impact. Since the focus of the study is students, it is proposed to be conducted at several private and public academic institutions across four major cities Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Surat, and Vadodara in the state of Gujarat, involving both UG and PG students studying a broad spectrum of technical and non – technical courses. Following a thorough review of all the pertinent literature, a questionnaire will be meticulously developed for the collection of primary data. Secondary data will be obtained from relevant sources, including research papers, publications, reports, and

websites. Stratified random sampling will be employed to ensure that the sample of college students is a true reflection of all the departments and faculties present on campus. The optimal sample size of 650 is determined by considering both the population size and the required level of confidence. The data will be analysed using frequency distribution as well as graphical analysis, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics (T-test, ANOVA), Structural Equation Modelling, and discriminant analysis.

7. Proposed Outcome:

For university administrators to fully understand the factors that influence students' university selection process and to identify the most significant aspects in their decision-making, it is crucial to comprehend the students' reasoning and the steps they take to choose an institution. Prospective students often visit the college or university's website as their first step in gathering information about the institution before deciding to attend. Educational institutions may significantly enhance student engagement by using impactful display ads. Within the realm of display marketing, the target demographic comprises of students who are actively considering enrolling in educational institutions. Educational institutions may use social media to highlight specific course offerings, academic majors, and extracurricular activities in order to attract attention. Prospective students have the chance to enrol in a wide range of academic courses provided by the university. The purpose of this is to provide potential students the opportunity to completely assimilate into the educational institute community. Regularly engaging in educational institute life via social media may enhance students' self-perception as engaged members of the campus community. Consequently, individuals will develop a more profound feeling of affiliation with the institution. When students are content with their experiences, they possess the capacity to become supporters for their institution. They may do this by sharing their positive experiences of attending that educational institute with others.

8. Limitations of the Study:

The biased nature of the findings can be attributed to the study's dependence on the responses to the questionnaire. It is critical to note, nevertheless, that the evaluation and interpretation may be naive due to the possibility that the survey omitted some crucial information. The state of Gujarat was selected as the study's location on account of the restricted timeframe and the abundance of additional resources and materials. The potential for demographic and geographical variables to undergo

modifications introduces the possibility that the study's findings may deviate from initial projections.

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